

EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Leisure Culture and Young People
LEAD OFFICERS:	Director of Localities and Prevention
DATE:	15 June 2017

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Leisure Culture and Young People
WARD/S AFFECTED:	All
KEY DECISION:	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

SUBJECT: Community Asset Transfers: Creating Community HUBs

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The council's community asset transfer programme has been a huge success and has enabled the borough and its communities to remain resilient in the face of significant cuts to the public sector. A lot of credit has to go to the voluntary groups and their volunteers who continue to make a difference in ensuring that there is a local neighbourhood offer.

As we look to the next phase of this strategy we have undertaken a review and wish to reflect on how we can further strengthen and ensure important facilities are financially viable and sustainable. This would be on a business case basis to promote asset based working to use local community centres to host activity that will promote wellbeing of our communities, support their independence, reduce isolation and act as a focal point, as a 'Community Hub'.

The aim of the council is to create more integrated and collaborative working between communities, public, private and voluntary sector. It will do this by aligning its volunteer, asset based community working, creating greater awareness of what is out there and what is needed. Where possible the council will facilitate the delivery of activity by partners and voluntary groups in community centres.

Community centres in Blackburn with Darwen have been asset transferred through various agreements with Voluntary and 3rd Sector Organisations. Three centres have transferred under lease (varying lengths) and six centres transferred under Licence. All of these are due to end in 2018 and will need to be reviewed and updated. The asset transfers have been successful by delivering community management of buildings, continuation of activities and services for deprived communities where the council is no longer able to resource activity. Asset transfers have also achieved significant financial savings for the Council.

The dedication, drive and passion of the volunteers is highly valued by the Council and has allowed six centres to remain open for the benefit to the most deprived communities in the borough. The significance of the work undertaken by the volunteers cannot be underestimated, with a daily commitment ensuring the centre and the valued activities can continue to benefit the local community.

Each of the centres has faced challenges over the four years, particularly as public services have

faced austerity. This has impacted on the financial contributions to these centres and their ability to remain resilient under continued challenges. The Council's tapering grant support has come to an end and this has left some voluntary organisations with no operating funds. This has tested their ability to continue delivery of services at the same level. All volunteers have remained focussed on generating income to meet the financial commitments of the centres, but in austere times this has become increasingly difficult. Support to the community centres for key areas including sustaining volunteers, increasing activity, external funding and improving financial and governance systems, is delivered under contract by Community CVS.

The volunteer-run community centres have varied financial performance, while those that have low levels of reserves have good sources of income to cover expenditure. Others are struggling to sustain income levels but have relied on good levels of reserves which will support their operations in the short-term. In order to deliver effective financial sustainability for the centres it is clear that without ongoing financial support to the volunteer-run centres the Council may be faced with risks of these centres not being able to operate, thus posing difficult decisions in the near future.

It is also worth bearing in mind that by their very nature these centres are very accessible by the general public and offer the council the opportunity to engage them as part of a community asset based development strategy. This also includes the ability to offer universal, self-help and volunteer support.

There is an opportunity for the Council to utilise the community assets to support statutory services by delivering informal preventative programmes through asset based community development. Adult's social care is an example of this where community services can help provide a way to support people who are socially isolated and have mental health issues. A weekly breakfast club in the community centres could provide an opportunity to improve health outcomes by providing an informal setting where they can socialise with others in the community and interact helping to improve mental wellbeing. This could be linked to a weekly moderate exercise session which helps to improve their mobility and physical health. The individual would also have the opportunity to join other activities in the centre that they may be interested in. The list of activities needs to be agreed but a small fund of support per centre would help the volunteers to meet needs to support 'step-down' of formal care, create opportunities to invest in preventative services and support sustainability.

There will be other opportunities for the community centres to link into agendas such as 'digital first' by providing public access to computers, improving worklessness through access to volunteer opportunities and work clubs in a community setting. These are just two examples of a range of initiatives that could be established.

There will be a direct link between the community asset transfer and the work of the localities teams to promote early intervention and prevention.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- 1) Note the update on Community Asset Transfers.
- 2) Delegate authority to the Director of Localities & Prevention and the Director of HR, Legal & Corporate Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Leisure & Culture to agree and finalise updates legal agreements in consultation with all community centre management boards.
- 3) Agrees that the transferred Community Centre assets be commissioned as venues to deliver various programmes that will support asset based community development on a case by case basis.

3. BACKGROUND

Introduction

Prior to 2010, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council directly managed and operated community centres across the borough, located in deprived areas. These centres are the hub of activity for the community and are utilised by prevention and support services delivered by a range of agencies, including Council, NHS and voluntary and faith sector charities.

In 2007, the Royds Review completed an independent review of community assets. Due to significant financial challenges, the review informed the Council's strategy in transferring the assets to community organisations/partners or investigates the closure of the facilities. Since then, the Council has asset transferred all community centres in the borough to a combination of third sector and voluntary organisations.

This has meant the Council found alternative ways of delivering services through community centres without directly managing and financing the services. A significant number of people are volunteering their personal time and commitment to manage community centres, it is acknowledged that the passion, drive and dedication of the volunteers is highly valued and crucial to continue to deliver these vital services in deprived communities across the borough. Asset transfers have allowed the Council to make significant budget savings whilst allowing the centres to remain open. Obtaining direct management control over the centres has allowed volunteers to take ownership. This has meant their motivation to invest personal commitment and time has increased. The achievements of individual centres have been varied dependant on skill-set of the volunteers but also the challenges presented in each centre.

Achieved successful outcomes

The Community Asset Transfers have been a successful process for the Council for the following reasons:

- **Community management control:** Allowing local groups to manage assets and make decisions on behalf of the local community has proved beneficial. The groups have maintained and increased the programme of activity and secured investment from external funders to improve buildings.
- **Financial Savings:** The Council has made financial savings through the asset transfer of community centres in 2010 with strategic costs of property management, business rates and building insurance costs remaining for six volunteer-managed community centres.
- **Utilised Assets:** All the community centres continue to be well used and provide a vital focal point of access for their communities – especially the most vulnerable. The centres have remained open and despite the challenges the centres are proving to be resilient with the tireless efforts of the volunteers is critical in delivering the services.

Key areas of development

Each of the centres have had different challenges over the last five years, the volunteers have learnt and developed over the years, worked hard to keep the centres running and have had the determination to keep going. There have been a number of challenges faced, as finances have become more pressured due to reducing grant payments and income generation pressures due to long-standing tenants vacating centres. Key areas for the volunteer-run community centres to develop include:

- Strengthening skills of volunteers
- Progression and succession planning
- Improved management of safeguarding
- Creating financial sustainability to deliver improved management

2016 Community Assets Vision:

“To strengthen community hubs that work flexibly to meet the changing needs of the local community. To empower healthier, digitally included and skilled communities to drive growth utilising the strength of asset based community development”

The community centres have further opportunities and the potential to help meet the wide-ranging needs of the local communities, this requires further support in order for centres to become self-sustaining, to develop and flourish for the longer-term future. The Council must continue to support and strengthen Community Centres, particularly those managed by volunteers to ensure their sustainability.

Five key components are required to deliver the vision:

1. Asset: The community facilities and ‘assets’ in Blackburn with Darwen have excellent capabilities to deliver to community needs. The centres require investment to bring them up to modern standards and to be appealing to all members of the community. Improved standards would also improve income generation and sustainability.
2. Volunteers: Volunteering is key to the delivery of community asset management and effective recruitment and retention of volunteers is crucial. The centres continue to remain open and for the benefit of the community through the commitment and drive of volunteers who dedicate their time to manage the centres.
3. Activities: The community centre activities vary from centre to centre based on the demands of users and the local community. There is scope to develop and establish further open access activities that anyone from the community can join.
4. Asset and Activity Mapping/Directory: The community hub activity and the facilities would benefit with mapping and a directory could be developed to allow people to select or be referred to activities based on their need.
5. Council Support: In order to deliver the Community HUB vision and continue to sustain these valued services in the local communities this review identifies a way that the Council could support sustainability and viability of volunteer-run community centres. This can be achieved by commissioning transferred Community Centre assets as venues to deliver various programmes that will support asset based community development. This will also create the platform for successful Community HUBs, deliver long-term benefits and valued services for the most deprived communities across Blackburn and Darwen.
6. Stronger Agreements: Develop confidence in volunteers to take on longer lease agreements, which will support their ability to obtain large-scale investment into community centres. To achieve the vision outlined above.

Current Interventions to support deliver of strategy

- Volunteer support contract: The centres run by volunteers require additional support and monitoring and this has been formalised in a contract with Community CVS.
- Community Centres Consortia: 'Neighbourhood Community Action' will be set-up to take advantage of joint procurement opportunities, draw in the required investment and support the centres longer-term sustainability.

Future Interventions to support delivery of strategy

Strengthened links to the Neighbourhoods agenda

Further links with the Neighbourhoods agenda for supporting the development of volunteers and sustainability will ensure the initiatives delivered through the community centres are aligned to localities teams to promote early intervention and prevention.

Sources for support through other programmes

There are opportunities through other programmes which can utilise community centre facilities to deliver projects via programmes such as European Structural Investment Fund Volunteer project, health initiatives, digital first, employability, Fair-share food programme and other initiative through partners. This will remain a key priority for the Director of Localities and Prevention to link other programmes into the community centres to strengthen the Community HUB vision.

Council support through provision of prevention activity

The Council has significant financial pressures in providing Adult Social Care, with pressures growing due to increased demand. There is a need to support the prevention agenda by supporting adults to improve their health through participating in activity that helps to promote improved physical health and more importantly improved mental health and wellbeing.

Any potential future commissioning will require the centres to deliver a programme of activities that could be accessed by social care providers and partners as a referral point. The type of activity centres deliver could include weekly breakfast club/lunch club and tailored physical activity session, which can be accessed by the community but could also be a referred activity by social workers, as a way to promote improved mental wellbeing by reducing social isolation in informal settings. This will allow service users to find out and access other activities being delivered at the centres. The Council with Clinical Commissioning Group currently commissions through the third sector activities which are capable of being delivered from Community Centres. Wherever possible we will look to develop integrated and collaborative delivery.

Conclusions

It is clear that the support of the Council is required to allow the centres to be sustainable for the future, particularly when the Council's tapering grant has been withdrawn, some centres are struggling to keep up with financial commitments and are having to draw from reserves, increase charges to community groups or significantly cut back on expenditure affecting the quality of service being delivered.

In order to deliver the Community HUB vision and continue to sustain these valued services in the local communities this review identifies a way that the Council could support sustainability and viability of volunteer-run community centres. This can be achieved through commissioning of the transferred Community Centre assets as venues to deliver various programmes that will support asset based community development on a case by case basis. This will also create the platform for successful Community HUBs and delivering long-term benefits and valued services for the most deprived communities across Blackburn and Darwen.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

The licences for six community centres are due to end in 2018. The volunteer-run centres were transferred under licence to volunteer groups; tapering financial support from the Council has ended. Due to changing income sources in austere times, the community centres have overall managed to keep up with current commitments but with the grant funding ending, centres may be able to manage for a year or two but to ensure long-term sustainability the Council will need to provide support in the form of commissioning to sustain the volunteer-run centres.

Volunteer capacity, skills and knowledge continues to be a key area of concern. With turnover of volunteers, continual support to ensure the required skill-set is effectively managed for centres, including effective financial management and safeguarding, this is formally managed through the contract with Community CVS.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Council undertook implementation of a Community Asset Transfer policy in 2010; the centres have been effectively managed outside of Council control with each centre having varied strengths and areas of improvement. There is a requirement to continue to support the development of volunteers to meet all their responsibilities in managing the centres effectively.

The new phase of Community HUB agreements need to consolidate current progress and identify key areas of development to ensure sustainability for centres is assured. The Council must ensure that the Community HUBs are strengthened via alignment of ongoing support to assure the services delivered by volunteers in deprived communities are sustained in the long-term.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The council will use existing commissioning arrangements and budgets to support the Community HUBs to strengthen the community centres to support the Council's prevention agenda by delivering activities through asset based community development.

Property maintenance remains the key concern for volunteers who manage centres; therefore under any further agreements this responsibility will remain under Corporate Property, to allow the volunteers to focus on centre management and delivery of activities.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Initial consultation with community centre volunteers has shown that the majority are keen to maintain 5 year Licence agreement, although there is some confusion regarding the implications of Licence and Lease agreements. Formal consultation was held 30th March 2017 with Legal support and has helped clarify implications of the Lease/Licence agreements, also allowing volunteers to put forward their questions. The outcome of further consultations with community centre boards will ensure the agreement is suitable for each centre's capabilities.

Updated legal agreements will be approved by the Executive Member for Leisure & Culture to put into place prior to the current agreements expiring.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The Community HUBs require an ongoing support from the Council to assure their long-term sustainability; this will also allow activities to be provided in the centres to support the prevention agenda through asset based community development.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA link here*)

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

Initial consultation with Community Centre Boards and lead volunteers completed and feedback on future agreements completed. Further consultation planned to help clarify implications of Licence and Lease agreements to provide information to ensure the appropriate legal agreement is put in place to support future development and sustainability of centres.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	0.02
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DATE:	26/05/2017
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	
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